

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN

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WHY DOES AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC SPREAD SO SLOWLY?

The members of this Society will recall the excellent review of various attitudes toward folklore made four years ago by Professor Donald Davidson. You will also probably remember that one attitude favored in that review was that of taking part in folklore, of making it a cherished part of our lives.

You will also probably remember that, at a session two years ago, I applauded that approach to the lore of our folk but reminded the members that our country is big and ethnically and culturally various. Great stretches of it - northeast, north, and west - are populated in the main by those of various origins, and are subjected to comparatively rapid changes. Both of these conditions have resulted in these regional groups having not only no folklore of their own, but also in their knowing little or nothing of the fundamental lore of America as we, in the more homogeneous and less rapidly changing parts of the land, know it. I called attention to the fact that even in our region, where folklore is nearer the surface of the general consciousness, those of us who seek to know it better and whom people call folklorists are microscopically few.

I strove to encourage those who might be a bit discouraged by our fewness, and I declared my belief in the great value of our cause. But if the undertaking and the lore are worth while, I reasoned, the fact should be widely recognized; our views and our lore should spread.

But just how is our lore going to spread? On that occasion two years ago I expressed the conviction that we must do more than cherish it; that we must get in touch, in some way, with those institutions - schools, colleges, churches, book-publishing houses, music-publishing houses among them - which can do much to disseminate our beloved lore. We must also take note, I stated, of our communication institutions - the concert stage, theater, radio, press, and periodicals - with the idea of inducing them to contribute to the dissemination of folklore.

This looks sensible, I think. Indeed, some attempts have been made along this line. And some such attempts have had favorable results. But why has folklore spreading not been far more successful?

I think I have spotted one good reason: faulty merchandizing methods.

The folkloreless legions of Americans have established, for better or worse, definite standards. This is especially

true in music. The cultural musical goods they consume have been sifted, graded, and attractively packaged. And we come to them with unsifted, ungraded, run-of-the-mill goods and expect them to like it.

That they don't like it and won't take it in this form is shown by the following. The editor of the most widely used hymnal in America was deeply interested in incorporating in a new edition of that book a large number of American religious folk songs. But despite his genuine enthusiasm for this material, the book came out with but a paltry dozen of our folk hymn tunes while other nations were represented in that same collection by many scores of folk melodies.

Why did the editor reject our tonal material? Simply because it was not ready for his acceptance, as judged by the set standards of church-musical art. The thousand available tunes had not been sifted to find the best ones; and none of the melodies had been harmonized. The 500 hymn texts, too, were unselected; good texts were often associated with less acceptable tunes and vice versa. The arduous work of selecting and editing had not been done. The busy editor (editors are always busy) couldn't undertake the work. The folk material was rejected.

What is true of religious folk songs holds also for the secular variety. There is a much wider demand for these than can be filled. Music-club folk, pageant-producing folk, concert-giving folk, school-music folk, recreation directors and many others are asking for American folk songs in usable form; and they can't get them, in usable form. When they ask me for material, I point them to Sharp's two volumes. Usually they can't afford the \$12 price; and they can't find Sharp in any nearby library. And if they do succeed in finding that great mass of material, it still baffles them in that it is unsifted, unprocessed, unpackaged.

In a few months I may have a very interesting experience to report. There will be a conference of hundreds of Southern school music teachers in Birmingham. Two of those planning the conference told me that the teachers would, they thought, be interested in hearing from me about religious folk songs and in hearing the songs sung by a group of country singers. These two planners broached the matter, a few days ago, to the larger group of planners and ran into some objection. One member of the group, a supervisor of music in the schools of one of our most highly cultivated Southern states, was fearful of the material. He considered it crude, commonplace.

The proposal lies, for the present, in the balance. The teachers may hear about these songs and hear the songs themselves; and they may not. If the invitation comes; if they hear the songs and about them, and if the event leaves them cold; or, if the invitation doesn't come at all; I think it will be proper to lay the fiasco, in good part at least, to

the unwillingness of those representing an established educational system to have anything to do with run-of-the-mill ungraded musical material. It will be easier and safer, they will decide, to go on in whatever rut they happen to occupy. And they will be right. Music processing is not their job.

Nor is music processing our job, properly speaking. We may not even believe in this phase of propaganda. And we may justify our attitude as an unwillingness to defile our folk goods. But if we Southern folklorists persist in this conviction, there can be, as I see it, but two possible alternative results: either our folk music won't spread at all, or others will take over the job of processing and spreading it. If it is not spread at all, then the millions of our school children will keep on learning and singing folk songs of the Urals and Uruguay; our church-goers will go on intoning synthetic hymn tunes; and the great non-school and non-church commercial-institutional sources of musical influence on youth will continue perfectly free to pander to the lowest common denominator of public taste in purveying what pays best. And if outsiders take over what we say is not our job, if they take our folk songs away from us and process them as they see fit, then we may be sure that they will really defile them.

Truly, the price of our complacency is a high one.

George Pullen Jackson

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FAMILY FOLK FRONTS IN RIME AND RHYTHM

The moon shines bright,
May I carry you home tonight?
The stars are shining, too,
I don't care if you do.

The above quatrain may serve to introduce us to a number of efforts in verse which relate to lovers, courtships, marriage, and the general ups and downs of life. Many of these are composed in the form of couplets and are brought together in various compositional forms. But most of these, like the ballad, have been modified to suit the whims of time.

In these couplets the effect is most often gained through the use of a simile or a metaphor, as

A girl that whistles or a hen that crows
Makes her way wherever she goes.

And all novices should know

Cold hands,
Warm heart;
Clean feet,
Sweetheart.

And heed the warning that

You'll never miss your water
Until your well goes dry;
You'll never miss your sweetheart
Until he says goodbye.

And then to take care of a proper marriage, the bride
should be dressed in

Something old, something new;
Something borrowed - something blue.

And then to remember

When the husband's away
The wife will play.

Or

Sing before you sleep
Cry before you eat.

Perhaps it may make a difference on what day you were
married if this rule is followed:

Monday for health,
Tuesday for wealth,
Wednesday the best day of all;
Thursday for losses,
Friday for crosses,
Saturday no luck at all.

And remember

Blessed is the bride the sun shines on,
Blessed is the grave the rain falls on.

And parents who plan to give birth should know that

Monday's bairn is fair of face,
Tuesday's bairn is full of grace;
Wednesday's bairn has far to go,
Thursday's bairn is full of woe;
Friday's bairn is loving and giving,
Saturday's bairn works hard for a living.
But a child born on the Sabbath Day
Is lucky and bonny and wise and gay.

The variants to this would make the prospect a little confusing, as

Wednesday's child is fair of face,
Thursday's child is full of grace;
Friday's child has far to go,
Saturday's child is full of woe.

And remember, not too late

Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a man marries his trouble begins.

And whether Poor Richard first recommended it or not,
remember also that

He that would thrive
Must rise at five;
He that has thriven
May lie till seven.

And

He that by the plow would thrive
Himself must either hold or drive.

And the weather-wise knows that

A sunshiny shower
Won't last half an hour.

And the mother should be careful in selecting her wash day, for

Wash on Friday, wash in need;
Wash on Saturday, sleet indeed.

Or perhaps she should begin earlier, but to

Wash on Monday, have week to dry;
Wash on Tuesday, one day shy;
Wash on Wednesday, they are not to blame;
Wash on Thursday, wash for shame;
Wash on Friday, wash for need;
Wash on Saturday, slovenly indeed.

Family responsibilities may cause one to grow a little superstitious; so to

Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for danger;
Sneeze on Tuesday, kiss a stranger;
Sneeze on Wednesday, receive a letter;
Sneeze on Thursday, something better;
Sneeze on Friday, expect sorrow;
Sneeze on Saturday, joy tomorrow.

or for the lover,
(Variant) -- see your sweetheart tomorrow.

And what families do not have their brawls, but

If ifs and ands were pots and pans,
There were no need for tinkér's hands.

Well,

Solomon Grundy
Was born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Ill on Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday,
And that was the end
Of Solomon Grundy.

The trouble all started this way - a sort of family stew:

Molly, my sister, and I fell out
,And what do you think it was about?
She loved the boys and the boys loved me,
And that was the reason we couldn't agree.

And on Solomon's tombstone was read:

Remember friend as you pass by,
As you are now so once was I;
As I am now so you must be,
Prepare for death and follow me.

And thinking that all's well that ends well,

"Let's go to bed" said Sleepy Head.
"Let's wait awhile" said Slow.
"Put on the pot" said Greedy Sot,
"Let's eat before we go."

And now, if you don't like my story,

I'll tell you like the Dutchman told the Jew -
"If you don't like me, I don't give a dam about you."

E. G. Rogers

To the members of the Tennessee Folklore Society,

Greetings:

And may the year upon which we are already embarked be very kind to you.

For our society we wish a more prosperous year. We want many more members, and we would that these members lay aside their modesty and make unsolicited contributions to our splendid Bulletin. Our excellent editor will thank you, and other members would get enjoyment from it.

Let us all delve deeper into the lives of our ancestors and get more of the little things that made them great. The songs they sang, the games they played, the stories they liked, their beliefs and superstitions - these things that made the sum total of their daily lives were the influencing features of their strong characters.

Of our forebears we are justly proud. We must not lose our traditions, our heritage from them.

Let us help our fellow members in their respective interests, and may we all work a little harder to make our society a flourishing organization.

Most sincerely,

Mrs. Flora L. McDowell, President

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President

Mrs. Flora L. McDowell, Smithville

Treasurer

Mr. T. J. Farr, Cookeville

Secretary, and Editor of the Bulletin

Miss Dorothy Horne, Maryville

Membership fee and subscription to the Bulletin, one dollar
a year.

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

The Greenhouse - Paul Flowers

This slim little book, with its charming cover design of green vines, is by none other than our friend and contributor, Paul Flowers, of the Memphis Commercial Appeal. The poems, sketches, and anecdotes which it contains are taken from his daily column, which also bears the name of The Greenhouse, and are by many contributors, although Mr. Flowers seems to have been responsible for most of the sketches.

Some of the poetry is pure schmaltz; some is decidedly arresting. Some is experimental, as is the composite ballad on Lorenzo Dow, written by students of Miss Evelyn Hammett at Delta State Teachers College, Cleveland, Mississippi. The anecdotes are purely in the folk tradition, and all the sketches are good reading. We particularly liked the one about "Kitty and the Attic Fan."

Unfortunately, there is no indication in the book as to where it may be obtained or how much it costs. However we venture to state that a card addressed to Mr. Flowers in care of the Commercial Appeal would give one that information. We urge our readers to try the experiment.

"Sumer is Icoumen in" - a Revision - Manfred F. Bukofzer. The University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1944

This monograph on the famous Summer canon would seem to be of tremendous importance to musicologists, for it does much to clear up a mystery that has always puzzled them. The mystery: why other examples of music from the middle of the thirteenth century (the date of the Summer canon has always been given as 1240) are so far inferior to the famous rota in both popular appeal and intrinsic craftsmanship.

Mr. Bukofzer's solution of this mystery shows sound scholarship. Briefly, he proves that the date of the rota can have been no earlier than the first quarter of the fourteenth century, which makes it contemporary with the Winchester and Worcester schools, and well after the discovery of the ostinato. To the Summer canon Mr. Bukofzer still accedes two distinctions: it is still the first composition for six voices, and still the earliest specimen of a canon.

- D. H.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Arriving too late to be reviewed for this issue is the Texas Folk Lore Society's From Hell to Breakfast, edited by Mody C. Boatwright and Donald Day. We promise a review of this volume, the nineteenth in the Society's series of publications, in the next issue.

We also send to Professor Ralph Steele Boggs our profound thanks for including our organization and Bulletin in his Folklore Americas, published in December, 1944. This is subtitled "Partial List of Persons and Organizations Interested in Folklore in the New World," and, as its name implies, includes people and organizations in Central and South America.

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Two more exchange publications are now in the Society's library. They are Armenian Folksongs, by Sirvart Poladian; and Literary Sources of Secular Music in Italy (ca. 1500), by Walter H. Rubsamen. Both of these are University of California publications in Music, the former in 1942, the latter in 1943.

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Mr. T. J. Farr sends us the following:

"A Cookeville family searching for a Christmas tree a few miles from town came to a farmhouse on the mountainside and inquired concerning the possibility of finding a Christmas tree in that vicinity. The farmer replied courteously,

"There is bootles of Christmas trees up that thar mountain."

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Our G.I. member from Hawaii, Private Nicholas, sent us a few more choice examples of Army slang. We include only a few now, saving the rest for the next issue.

1. Barb wire city - guard house
2. Cushion crusher - general
3. Droop - last guy to answer reveille
4. Go to hell cap - overseas hat
5. Inner sanctum - officers' mess
6. Line up like four rows of corn - line up straight
7. Passing the blackout - issuing coffee on general basis
8. Pray day - Sunday in camp
9. Soupsuds row - married soldiers' quarters
10. Strictly cut plug - feeling fine or well pleased

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The author of our first article needs no introduction to our readers. The name of George Pullen Jackson is so well known to folklorists that anything we might say in introduction would be superfluous, if not downright impertinent. We are happy indeed that he is one of our members. The present paper was read at the annual meeting last fall in Nashville.

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Mr. E. G. Rogers is also well known to members of the TFS, although this is his first contribution to the Bulletin for some time. He has been a member of the Society for many years, and has appeared on the annual programs and served as an officer. He is principal of the Smith County High School at Carthage, Tennessee.